

## Message Text

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ACTION EUR-25

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C O N F I D E N T I A L MOSCOW 14201

USIA FOR IBS

E.O. 11652 GDS

TAGS: PINT, PFOR, UR

SUBJ: THE SUNDAY AFTERNOON ART MASSACRE

REF: MOSCOW 13964

1. SUMMARY. THE FUROR CAUSED BY THE MILITIA'S BRUTAL BREAKUP OF THE OPEN AIR UNOFFICIAL ART EXHIBIT IN MOSCOW SEPTEMBER 15 (REFTEL) HAS ONCE AGAIN PUT THE REGIME IN THE POSITION OF SHOWING ITS WORST FACE TO THE WORLD. THE MILITIA ACTION SEEMS TO HAVE BEEN CONCEIVED AS AN ENTRAPMENT, BUT WE SUSPECT THE DECISION TO USE FORCE WAS PROBABLY NOT TAKEN AT A VERY HIGH LEVEL, AND THAT FOREIGN REACTION TO THE EVENT MAY NOT HAVE BEEN CAREFULLY CONSIDERED. BUT THE AFFAIR HAS NOW BEEN ESCALATED INTO A CHALLENGE TO THE REGIME'S AUTHORITY WHICH MUST BE BALANCED AGAINST ITS CONCERN FOR ITS IMAGE ABROAD. WHILE SOME DESIRE ON THE PART OF THE AUTHORITIES TO LESSEN THE DAMAGE HAS BEEN EXHIBITED, THE ARTISTS' PUBLIC THREAT TO RESTAGE THE EXHIBIT SOON MAKES ANOTHER CONFRONTATION OF SOME KIND PROBABLE. END SUMMARY.

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2. THE SACKING BY THE MILITIA OF THE UNOFFICIAL ART EXHIBIT IN MOSCOW SEPTEMBER 15 SMACKED OF ENTRAPMENT, ALTHOUGH THERE ARE CONFLICTING STORIES OF WHAT THE ORGANIZERS WERE TOLD WHEN THEY MADE THE REQUEST TO THE CITY TO STAGE IT. IT SEEMS ACCURATE, AS REPORTED BY CORRESPONDENTS, THAT THE AUTHORITIES HAD COMMUNICATED TO THE ORGANIZERS THE NEGATIVE RULING OF UNION OF ARTISTS WHICH MIGHT HAVE BEEN CONSTRUED AS AN OFFICIAL TURN-DOWN BUT WHICH THE ORGANIZERS CHOSE TO IGNORE (ON CONSISTENT GROUNDS THAT THEY WERE NOT MEMBERS OF THE UNION). THERE WERE AMPLE OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE AUTHORITIES TO FORMALLY DENY PERMISSION FOR THE EXHIBIT, AND THE POSSIBILITY OF A SLIP-UP OR LACK OF COORDINATION BETWEEN THE CITY AND SECURITY AUTHORITIES SEEMS SLIGHT. IT IS POSSIBLE THAT THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR DEALING WITH THE EXHIBIT PASSED INTO THE HANDS OF THE SECURITY ORGANS BECAUSE THE CITY COULD NOT DECIDE HOW TO DEAL WITH THE REQUEST. WHETHER OR NOT THE INTENTION WAS ENTRAPMENT, THE RESULT WAS A VERY WELL-PUBLICIZED CONFRONTATION WHICH MAY HAVE BEEN ONE OF THE ORGANIZERS' PRIMARY OBJECTIVES. IF UNOFFICIAL ARTISTS, WITH THE ENFORCED EXODUS OF DISSIDENT WRITERS, ARE BEGINNING TO FEEL LIKE THE EMBATTLED NEXT TARGET, THIS ABORTED SHOW DID MORE TO GAIN THEM WORLDWIDE ATTENTION THAN THEY COULD EVER HAVE EXPECTED FROM AN UNMOLESTED TWO-HOUR EXHIBITION IN A DRIZZLE ON AN EMPTY LOT AT THE OUTSKIRTS OF TOWN.

3. THE REASONS FOR THE AUTHORITIES' CRUDE ACTION ARE STILL UNCLEAR. THE ORGANIZERS THEMSELVES SEE THE PRECEDENT SUCH A SHOW WOULD HAVE BECOME AS THE MOST DISAGREEABLE PROSPECT FOR THE AUTHORITIES. THERE WAS ALSO PROBABLY AN ELEMENT OF RETALIATION AGAINST LONG-HAIRED, BEARDED NON-CONFORMISTS WHO FLOUT "COMMUNIST MORALITY". WHY THE AUTHORITIES CHOSE TO ADMINISTER THIS LESSON IN THE PRESENCE OF DIPLOMATS AND WESTERN JOURNALISTS IS EVEN LESS CLEAR. WHILE WE DO NOT COMPLETELY REJECT THE NOTION THAT "ENEMIES OF DETENTE" CREATED THE SET-UP, WE SUSPECT THAT THE DECISION TO USE FORCE WAS NOT TAKEN AT A VERY HIGH LEVEL, THAT NARROWER MOTIVES WERE INVOLVED, AND CONFIDENTIAL

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THAT THE QUESTION OF IMAGE-DAMAGE ABROAD WAS EITHER IGNORED OR NOT CAREFULLY CONSIDERED.

4. NOW THE ARTISTS HAVE ESCALATED THE AFFAIR INTO A CHALLENGE TO THE REGIME. IN A LETTER TO THE SOVIET GOVERNMENT THEY HAVE STATED THEIR INTENTION TO RE-STAGE THE EXHIBIT AT THE SAME SITE ON SEPTEMBER 29, AND SOME HAVE TOLD EMBOFFS THAT THEY WILL PERSIST IN THIS

ATTEMPT. TASS ENGLISH SERVICE SEPTEMBER 18 CARRIED THE FIRST OFFICIAL COMMENT ON THE AFFAIR, CLAIMING THAT "LITTLE-KNOWN" ARTISTS AND WESTERN JOURNALISTS WANTED TO CREATE A SENSATION. THE ITEM DOES NOT INDICATE HOW THE SECOND REQUEST MAY BE HANDLED, EXCEPT TO SAY THAT THE ATTEMPTS OF "ENEMIES OF OUR COUNTRY" TO ATTACK SOVIET CULTURAL POLICIES WILL COME TO NOTHING.

5. SINCE THE EXHIBIT CLOSURE HAS BECOME AN INTERNATIONAL CAUSE CELEBRE, IT CAN NO LONGER BE HANDLED AS A STRICTLY LOCAL MATTER; IT HAS BECOME A TEST OF THE REGIME'S CONCERN FOR ITS IMAGE ABROAD AS OPPOSED TO THE THREAT TO ITS AUTHORITY. TO A CERTAIN DEGREE THE CHALLENGE IS SIMILAR TO THE SOLZHENITSYN CASE, BUT BECAUSE OF THE UNLIKELIHOOD OF DEPORTING SEVERAL DOZEN ARTISTS, IT CANNOT BE HANDLED IN THE SAME WAY. THE RELATIVELY LIGHT SENTENCES METED OUT TO FIVE OF THE ARTISTS ARRESTED (FIFTEEN DAYS IMPRISONMENT FOR THREE AND SMALL FINES FOR THE OTHER TWO) MAY INDICATE THE AUTHORITIES' DESIRE TO MINIMIZE THE DAMAGE ALREADY DONE. AT THIS POINT WE WOULD GUESS THAT THE AUTHORITIES WILL TRY TO HEAD OFF THE EXHIBIT IN ADVANCE RATHER THAN CAUSE ANOTHER VIOLENT PUBLIC CLASH, BUT, GIVEN THE APPARENT DETERMINATION BY THE ARTISTS TO PERSIST IN THE MATTER, ANOTHER NASTY CONFRONTATION MAY BE IN THE MAKING.

6. IN THE ABSENCE OF LOCAL MEDIA PLAY, FOREIGN RADIO HAS BEEN AN IMPORTANT ELEMENT IN THIS STORY AND THE EMBASSY HAS HAD INDICATIONS THAT VOA AND OTHER FOREIGN RADIOS ARE BEING CLOSELY LISTENED TO AND COMPARED IN THEIR COVERAGE OF THE EVENT.

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